

Latent Tuberculosis

What is latent TB infection?

Most people who breathe in TB bacteria and become infected are able to fight the bacteria and stop them from growing. The bacteria become inactive, but they remain alive in the body and can become active later. This is called latent TB infection.

People with latent TB infection

- Have no symptoms.
- Don't feel sick.
- Can't spread TB to others.
- Usually have a positive skin test reaction.
- Can develop active TB disease if they do not receive treatment for latent TB infection.

Many people who have latent TB infection may never develop active TB disease. In these people the TB bacteria remain inactive for a lifetime without causing disease. In other people, especially people who have weak immune systems, the bacteria become active and cause TB disease.

What do I do if I have TB infection?

Your doctor may recommend medication to reduce the chances of TB infection progressing to TB disease. Taking antibiotic treatment for 6 –9 months can protect you from developing TB disease in the future. It is important to take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. TB drugs are provided free of charge from the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit.

Is the treatment safe?

Most people complete the treatment without problems, but these drugs may harm the liver. Stop your medication and see your doctor immediately if you have any of these symptoms:

- Loss of appetite.
- Feel sick to your stomach.
- Rash.
- Itching.
- Brown or dark urine.
- Yellowish skin or eyes.
- Stomach pain or discomfort.
- Fever.

People who drink heavily or have hepatitis may already have weak livers. Your doctor can order a blood test to see if your liver has been affected. If you develop liver problems, stopping the medication will allow the liver to heal itself. It is always best not to drink alcohol if you are taking TB drugs.